



The Butchertide arc



Butchertide campaign arc, for dm use only- players stop reading this.



Above, placeholder map of the city of Ayemri- im gonna make my own on Inkarnate.

Running my game in the Grimhollow setting, 5e, which is basically medieval, gritty low-magic dark fantasy set in the land of Etharis, most of the gods' influence is faint, with them either dead or absent, leaving us behind to defend ourselves. Magic is distrusted; people are afraid and superstitious, and everything has fallen into hard times, and many have become cruel to survive.

I'm using the gist of the timeline outlined in [this history](#). The campaign takes place in 954-EI (ex indorio), nine hundred and fifty-four years after the coronation of Emperor Indorius I and his hundred-year golden reign over the once holy Burach Empire- and six hundred and four years since the assassination of the mad inbred Emperor Leopold XVI in 604EI, culminating in the god's end three hundred and fifty years ago. The campaign takes place in Charnealt, twenty-five years after the dark cursed mists began to spread across the land- the setting is a homebrew city named Ayemri (see following docs) founded almost/around 400 years ago- the recent Butchertide events started twelve years ago. The Burach Empire is slightly more industrialised, with access to more cannons, muskets, etc thanks to their truce with their dwarves; however, technological/industrial progress is stagnant.

This arc of the campaign is intended to last around 10 sessions. I've about 4-5 players; they start at 4th lvl and will level up around 3 times across this arc of the campaign. This arc is intended to be around/over 10 sessions. We're all pretty experienced playing dnd, and this is my 3rd time running a campaign.

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House rules of the campaign:

Grievous & Permanent wounds from Grimhollow,

Fear & Stress from Van Ritchen's Guide to Ravenloft, (each player has two seeds of fear),

Origin feats at lvl1,

Half regen max hp each long rest,

Consume rations (food/drink) to benefit from long rest,

Quality of life consumption: "Consuming food, drink. herb or medicine no longer requires the use of an action, but instead the use of a bonus action or no action based on size of consumable."

The Cast:

- **Rigel**, a human barbarian (berserker), he comes from a small isolated fiefdom (somewhere in the Thousand Rivers) in the Charneault Kingdom. He's around mid/late 30s, the only child of humble merchants who peddled on the borders of the kingdom; he took progressively riskier/shadier jobs to support them until one day taking out the son of a minor noble on a highway killing- his team/employers scapegoated him and so was sentenced to be hanged but was able to escape this fate by being 'damned' in cursed armour: Incredibly painful, curse of binding type armour (think armour from berserk, or penitent armour from fungus) and sent to die on the front lines or until whatever divinity may be sees fit to forgive him- he survived tho and still gets shamed for it (like how post-war Japanese viewed surviving kamikaze pilots): His call to adventure/goal is to be forgiven, freed of the armour, or find out who produced them. (!Note for later, he also has one of the closest bloodlines to Sir Heugh, around tier 4).
- **Hrager**, a dwarf (soulknife) rogue; he's from Corova in the Castinellan Provinces. He's around (x?) y.o. Was very recently appointed to the rank of inquisitor by the Arcanist Inquisition a zealous military branch of the church specialising in witch-hunting and exterminating any foul magics aside from the divine (child sorcerers included)- he's keeping this a secret from the other party members though, and is keeping tabs on Vamp. His call to adventure is to prove himself and solidify his position: As well as genuinely believing in the cause.
- **Vamp**, a dhampir sorcerer (clockwork), he's from Voyd in the Ostoyan Empire. He's 41 y.o but looks 23, he died sometime around the age of 5 (he doesn't remember what from) and his body was stolen and brought back to life in the estate of the Estoler noble vampire family. His call to adventure is to support his noble family by learning as much about the outside world as can, learn from others, and bring that home to his patrons.
- **(placeholder)**, a (homebrew) tiny origami construct monk drunken master, from Charnealt. Doesn't know how old he is or how long it's been since his creation. He's a tiny paper knight made like origami from a kids' book of fairytales, animated by a very powerful magic user to entertain children- but either he didn't know or no longer remember what happened to those children or his creator, so he's trying to find one-by-one some of the missing pages from the same book he was born from that's his call to adventure. Also he rides around a tiny flying paper griffon.
- **(placeholder2)**, a human fighter (battlemaster), more details to follow. Very early in character creation, 'character's general archetype would be a travelling pilgrim venturing out for fame or at least that's the surface-level impression he gives off. The more you pick at his story the more you realise it's a facade. His actual backstory is basically a variant of Toph Beifong's story: noble-born that decides to strike out on their own.' Allied with, or working under a monster hunters' guild.

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Im running the first arc in the kingdom of Charneault, which is very french / arthurian inspired more like og grimms fairy tales kinda thing- think a more corrupt Bretonnia with nature spirits and stuff. But theres this dark mist thats sprung up from the southwest that spreads everywhere causes corruption Ive taken the recommended 'Blood Knight and Five Relics' mini module from the book and homebrewed it a ton. This takes place on the north-eastern border, somewhere around Basion or Camont (close to Burach and Castinella), around the maze and river: In the homebrew city of Ayemri, which has a population of around 8k permanent citizens.

The city of **Ayemri** sits at the foot of a great and terrible waterfall ending in a lake of jagged rocks and stinging salt, the constant rush of water helps power mills and bounties of fish run down the stream: unfortunately this also makes upwards travel of the falls near impossible isolating the region from exporting upstream (and protecting from would-be invaders), doing so places you at the fickle mercy of the land's patron river/nature spirit represented as a great sea serpent.

For Millenia those upriver believed the falls the end of the known world, until centuries ago: Forced to flee by some invaders or tyrannical rule what would become the cities founders sailed to the fall's edge and performed a last stand- greatest among them the great knight Sir Heugh whom battered bloody and broken with nothing left for a weapon save the very chain and anchor of their ship would take the invaders with him over the falls- martyring himself and dashing his enemies against the rocks. The great spirit of the water was moved by his acts, and as the innocents fell it caught his people safely (surviving the landing): providing the building blocks for the city and an oath to the spirit. This is one of the most common versions of the story; what exactly that oath was between Sir Heugh and the spirit, and what the people who live in Ayermi need to do has been largely twisted/forgotten.

It has been almost 400 years since then, and the current ruling nobles claim to be the descendants of Sir Heugh; however, this has been falsified, and many Heugh's achievements have been credited to different historical or made-up figures to reinforce this. For this reason, the notion of the blood knight being Sir Heugh is nigh unthinkable (maybe he doesn't look like the statues and stuff depict), as Sir Heugh was a hero. Bloodknight leaves them alone, suspicious. Not included in the story is that Sir Heugh had in secret, some family/lineage that this oath would also pass down to unknowingly, anchoring the spirit and its favours to the material world through them and vice versa. These 'heirs' (now scattered and unremarkable, common dockworkers, peasants, squires, etc) make up around 7% of the city's population in total or around 560 people. Of these heirs there are different tiers of them depending on how closely related they are to him:

- **Tier 1, 85% or around 470 people.**
'Faint echo', have a dim lineage to Heugh- marginally no effect on the bloodknight.
- **Tier 2, 10% or around 50 people.**
'True lineage', have a close relationship to Heugh- worth lots to bloodknight.
- **Tier 3, 4% or around 22 people.**
'Strong blood', the bloodknight really likes and wants them.
- **Tier 4, 1% or around 5 people.**
'Anchor blood', the bloodknight only needs a few of them to complete the ritual.
- **Tier 5, one person.**
'Perfect blood', almost complete match to Heugh lineage- knight gets them its over.

In the years following the city's founding, the world falls apart. The gods' end (where they either died or drew back from the world, see grimhollow lore), and the nature spirits' influence waning as well as the periodic spread of dark mists across the land that bring corruption (twisting/angering the spirits). For the last couple of decades in Ayemri, there have been steadily more torrential floods and tumultuous water (maybe lots of rain), and there's been increasingly fewer fish, causing famine/disruption to the local economy- and those caught have been found sickly and mutated.

All of these events have weakened and destabilised the city, and arguing desperation and arguing desperation many guilds have begun poaching the neighbouring fey forests of fauna (think sacred stags etc) and local resources (fey wood, moss, etc- superior to the rotting mist-ridden ones used by the city, and many ingredients for alchemy as well) in an effort to revive Ayemri's economy and save the people living there (however there are many enterprising and ambitious people inside of said guilds which plan to harvest/exploit other stuff from the woods also, taking dangerously more than their share). What's known about the oath between the city and the river involved never taking much from the forests as a taboo, and trusting the river/falls to provide.

These expansions into the neighbouring forests are **viewed by the peasantry as a taboo**, and the poaching of the sacred creatures dwelling there(white stags etc) invites punishment by the fey: Regardless, many eat the salted venison anyway, shamefully aware they are now an accomplice in that sin. It is this punishment by the fey they believe caused the arrival of the blood knight.

This especially has got the attention of the neighbouring **Burach empire** to the north (militaristic and technologically advanced- think muskets, cannons, steam tanks, etc) who, already collapsing, sees the opportunity to seize a weakened area of Charneault and use it as a launchpad for a slow invasion. The Burach empire and their agents (embedded in guilds, or publicly as part of large companies) offer the dying city all their resources towards automation and industry (more advanced watermills, motorised axes/machines for clearing the forests, and advanced gear for their hunters as well as city guard). They are one of the major factions active in the campaign.

Another faction in the campaign is the growing influence of the **Arcanist Inquisition** from the Castinellan Provinces; they argue that the pagan and primitive worship of uncaring nature spirits (and not the arch seraphs) has manifested a demon resembling their hubris- the one who helped found the city coming to now destroy it: And through purging both those pagan worshippers, witches, and the fat satisfied guildmasters who traffic in fey-tainted goods, they will be rid of the demons influence: However slight they do provide some net positive in giving alms to the poor and downtrodden of Ayermi, providing them shelter against the elements the bloodknight, and their methods of burning away corruption (at the stake) coincidentally rob the blood knight of the viscera it needs to manifest itself, albeit with the caveat you are literally burning someone at the stake: As well their sanctification by dousing things in salt and holy oils also slows it's manifesting, in that being a ghost/undead it doesn't like salt (relating also the salt of the river spirit)- they dont know this is the reason though and credit it to the arch seraph Empyreus and their faith.

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The Bloodknight,

also known as the Redwraith, and the Butchertide, because of his uncanny ability to show up anywhere he pleases regardless of how well the doors are locked or many guards stationed: leaving behind a carpet of gore with no witnesses to see him vanish soon after: People aren't sure whether he's a man or some kind of demon.

The blood knight is a revenant (undead) ghost made out of blood that shows up when the mist rolls in, but he can manifest faster and easier where theres concentrations of fresh spilled blood (a fight, a slaughterhouse, etc) emerging from it- as well he can sense recent bleeding wounds and sniff them out like a shark, or feel the fast beating of someones heart when hes close. Being a ghost he doesn't like salt which also relates to the salt water/river of the city

Hes depicted as this huge 10ft crimson knight in decorated ornate armour now rusted and dented through- he's constantly dripping blood and indistinct at his edges; hes made out of vapour and liquid but can partly solidify himself when hes manifested (also means he can go through cracks and walls and drains). He has a great gaping whole in his chest where his heart should be, and from his belly runs a long 40smth foot bloody chain connected to anchor he wields as a weapon (can throw it and pull whatever's caught in the way back, swing it around, or throw it and pull himself towards it): kinda like a really horrible umbilical cord. Hes a part of sir heugh's soul that hasnt been able to pass on and is being puppeted around by this druidic cult.

The group/controlling behind the blood knight uses him as their attack dog, they've pulled part of his soul kicking and screaming and puppeting jt around as the knight as a means of collecting hearts (life) as the components for a ritual thatd provide the original nature spirits a new body anchor to our world, or life thatd help wake them up / restore balance; thatd help this god return to and fix the land (perhaps theyve seen some horrible apocalyptic event and reason this is lesser evil needed to prevent it)- but also the hearts of those actually descending from sir heugh (now scattered and forgotten about) are important or their life is and interacts with the spirit in some way coz theyve still that connection

Also theres some remnant of humanity inside the bloodknight fighting and failing to against their control over him and somehow freeing him could be a plot point.

The cult puppeting Sir Heugh might manifest his revenant somewhere to kill a particular npc or other (party protecing them or knowing them), only for the bloodknight to become distracted partway through having gotten a stray spot of blood taste from one of his heirs, the cult acting surprised trying to rein him back in as he locks on that person as his main target- just as likely to strike down one of his handlers or a random bystander. Alternatively, he might hesitate, flinch, or allow a few people to escape an encounter with him- he may go as far as to return abandoned children's toys on doorstops or pat stray dogs after a massacre. After the party learns his name, saying it or wearing items significant in life can cause him to falter.

Maybe when he takes your heart, so long as it wasn't damaged or anything, your body/soul is still alive- like in the morgue the victims/corpses when inspected may notice their eyes focusing on you, or look of constant anguish/fear. So they cant rest proper till bloodknight curse lifted.

The first part has my players as one of the parties hired by the ruling noble house Quivogne as a means of putting a stop to fears of the Butchertide or whatever is causing it.

Lady (Esme) Quivogne, mid 40s, widowed, lost her child- among last of her family: lesser noble, half sister to the current ruling family of House Rosaeth. She has a lot of influence within the city guard- she gets around 5 hours of sleep each night, and genuinely does love her city and the children of it and very overwhelmed by the butchertides which started around 12 years ago and have become increasingly more violent and frequent (around 200 dead in total)- the current party and the rival ones are the 4th round of parties she's sent to investigate, this is the 2nd official 'public one' unknown to the current party. Stern, perfect manners and etiquette, increasingly impatient.

Some of the other rival (enemy or ally) parties are: A team of inquisitor/witch hunters- they appear great from the get go but have a habit of contaminating crime scenes ('cleansing' evidence with fire) and scaring would-be witnesses. This group is called the **Order of His Ashen Mercy**- and are mainly based around the arch seraphs Emperus and Miklas. They've around 5 members, consisting of:

Sister Cyrene, human cleric of Miklas- early 20s, she's sweet and kind and the face of the group.

An elderly abbess, bard, she's the actual authority of the group- also does the cruellest things

A dragonborn paladin her twin brother idk what class- both secretly have doubts but would never reveal it to either, relying on one another for their fervour.

Burly eye patch witch hunter man, like the guy from the crucible play. Maybe a silent flagellant, or potentially some kind of werewolf or daemonhost type character they keep on a very tight leash as it helps root out dissidents.

There's also unofficially a team of would-be heirs to the house, some bastards, some disgraced and disowned, or cursed from birth and deformed, others who won't be next in line till ages, etc: some might have money sure, but very limited status, and no inheritance: they are the cousins, nieces and nephews of Lady Quivogne- who gave them a chance at securing a title. they're great at what they do but don't like the competition the party poses, and will secretly pay off bandits etc to make things more difficult for them or swoop in just in time to take the credit. They are called the **Casa Vaga**, and consist of:

Brun, 8ft tall monstrous tiefling/'omen'(elden ring)- horrible life. He's the muscle, has doubts

Annabelle only girl of group, grew up around the woods- idk what to do with her. Ranger?

Young boy, around 7, aberrant sorcerer? Could manipulate minds, pushing servants around from since he was little, then he learned to 'push them' magic has made him more spoiled. Tells brun what to do.

Young man, battlemaster, leader- doesn't actually care about the party.

I dunno need more people flesh out more.

Also there will be the Iron Watch, who are Burach guild mercenaries. Only 3 members, very elite.

Key locations- Castle Ul'fyr / 'chateau olithare': high castle carved into falls overseeing whole city. Quivogne manor (bordering city/woods) when she's not at the castle. Main cathedral 'saint of sunken iron'- has the morgue beneath it and some library stuff. Docks, market district, the guild/outposts shanty town on the woods. Fey woods. The river/falls.



First session has them investigating scenes of some of the massacres and hunting down who they think is the redwraith but who turns out to be copycat killer (maybe some buffed version of master thief statblock) but his methods are way cruder than the real bloodknight who can just reach into a 0hp person and pull their heart out without making a hole or breaking the skin/tissue so there'll be a conflict early on when checking out the morgue or the crimescenes and seeing the difference in how they were done.

The copycat killer wears this red ragged cloak and rusty iron mask throwing red smoke bombs and stuff and stole these piston boots off the Burach- hes a spring heeled jack type guy who leaves people hanging by their ankles with tiny cuts to bleed them out just conscious enough for hearts to beat afraid as lures for the real bloodknight Or he crowbars and saws them open and keeps the hearts as offerings.

Ages back was in one the hunting parties going into feywoods got jumped and his men slaughtered, so he crawled inside the body of a white stag he'd poached and figured out could use enough blood/violence could mask his scent- so now whenever the mist comes and his heart starts beating fast (little cut he got on his chest starts trickle blood) he sets up one of his lures as a distraction. It started at work with him just killing more and more animals they'd hunt, then hiding at the slaughterhouse, or chopping up the farmers' cattle, till it wasn't enough and had to start using people

The only family he has left is his elderly mother and his sick daughter who can be found in the first session begging for scraps outside one of the taverns or party hubs, if asked granny asks the party to find her son who disappeared into the mist looking for way to cure his girl (he was messed in the head after he lost his wife and son): If they go to his workplace they can discover the red smoke grenades/steam piston boots and gear that was stolen from the guild, and get some clue as to the weaknesses/faults in his gear (coz they're prototypes from the Burach).

Anyways in the first couple sessions they'll corner him, have a big fight, and rather than let himself be captured (coz he knows what'll happen if hes trapped in a cell alone and the bloodknight manifests to steal his heart) he chooses to kill himself rather than face the consequences- and from his spurting blood forms the real bloodknight who will kick off a big boss battle. He needs this red sulphuric blasting powder for his boots to work, that can be found under the fingernails of his victims or trace amounts in the scorch marks leave behind when jumps; he's was a member of the last party sent out by the noble employer Lady Quivogne



OLocal traditions culture:

Oh yea another thing about the culture of Ayermri is the belief that without gods being dead/gone as with the rest of the world, that should your child die young and innocent that you can commit them to a casket and float down river (their soul shall be light enough from life without sin that as it falls is not eaten by the rapids, but makes safe passage to the serpent) and they shall be reborn again as one of the sacred creatures of the river, a white horned eel or other- killing these innocents is one of the highest taboos but simultaneously people are starving.

Also burial at sea is common, and should the river return a body to you that should have sunk to the bottom then it means the serpent did not accept the soul and that is a great shame for the family.

Also pillagers fishers need to live (x) amount of their catch to rot or thrown back onto the ocean as a tithe to the spirit.

Elves are the second most common race in Ayemri.

A common city saying / what is engraved on the gates goes:

✿ **LE FLEUVE SE SOUVIENT** ✿

“The River Remembers”

There are small shrines everywhere across the map, similar to shintoism- ranging from the grand public statues on the castle grounds, the church, etc- the small weathered salt encrusted stone carvings up and down the river and docks or on bridges- to the old spiral standing stones in the woods that predate the city. These are to name a few.

Also it being nearly 400 years since the founding of the city and Sir Heugh, he's been changed and mythologised- often depicted with a twisting greatsword and ornate armour like fishscales- nothing like the real guy. Some think he fought the serpent and tamed it to the city's will.

Broad plans for campaign

Direction wise for this arc i wanna drop them in a noble arthurian fantasy setting like Charneault that they're familiar with, and have the corruption / evil be more subtle- kinda provide a segway for later if we continue the campaign when exploring darker places.

Events i want to establish some of the major players and factions early, like the german Burach empire (north on the map) and their expansionism as well as the inquisition from spanish castinella and the extremism as well as necessary evil they provide (kinda like the inquisition) so they can side with people or make enemies early, depending on what they do the city where it takes place could fall under influence of some of the different groups.

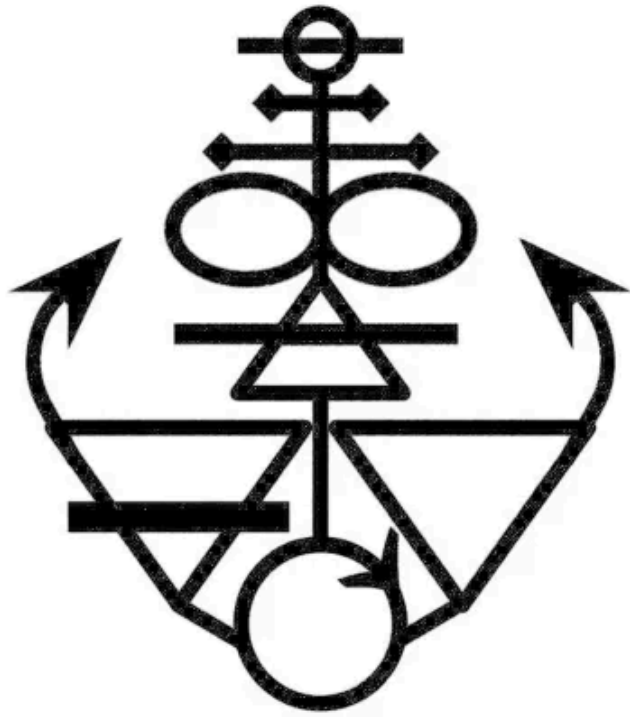
The big event is gonna be putting a stop to the ritual the cults trying to perform to awaken the serpent nature spirit with enough blood and the hearts of those descended from sir heugh who it made a pact with. Eventually theyll realise the redwraith is going after specifically the secret now common/peasant descendants of sir heugh (a couple npcs theyd now made friends with) and have to protect them or escort them to the ritual site to stop it; so thats gonna be a really big fight- especially if the serpent partly awakens and starts laying waste to the city or maybe a demon has been feeding off the bloodshed and uses it as a doorway into our world.

If they work with the guilds who some are performing hunting and excavations in the fey woods for necessity (a couple are agents / involved in the foreign Burach empire whos profiteering off this and whats to invade expand their borders) probably try stop the serpents being awakened or alternatively enslave it.

If they work with inquisition city falls under control of Castinellan provinces to expand, the serpent is killed and magic and nature spirits burned out from the roots. Those are some of the figures etc they can get aligned with



Above, bloody sigil used for the ritual.



Incorporates alchemical symbols, from top-bottom:

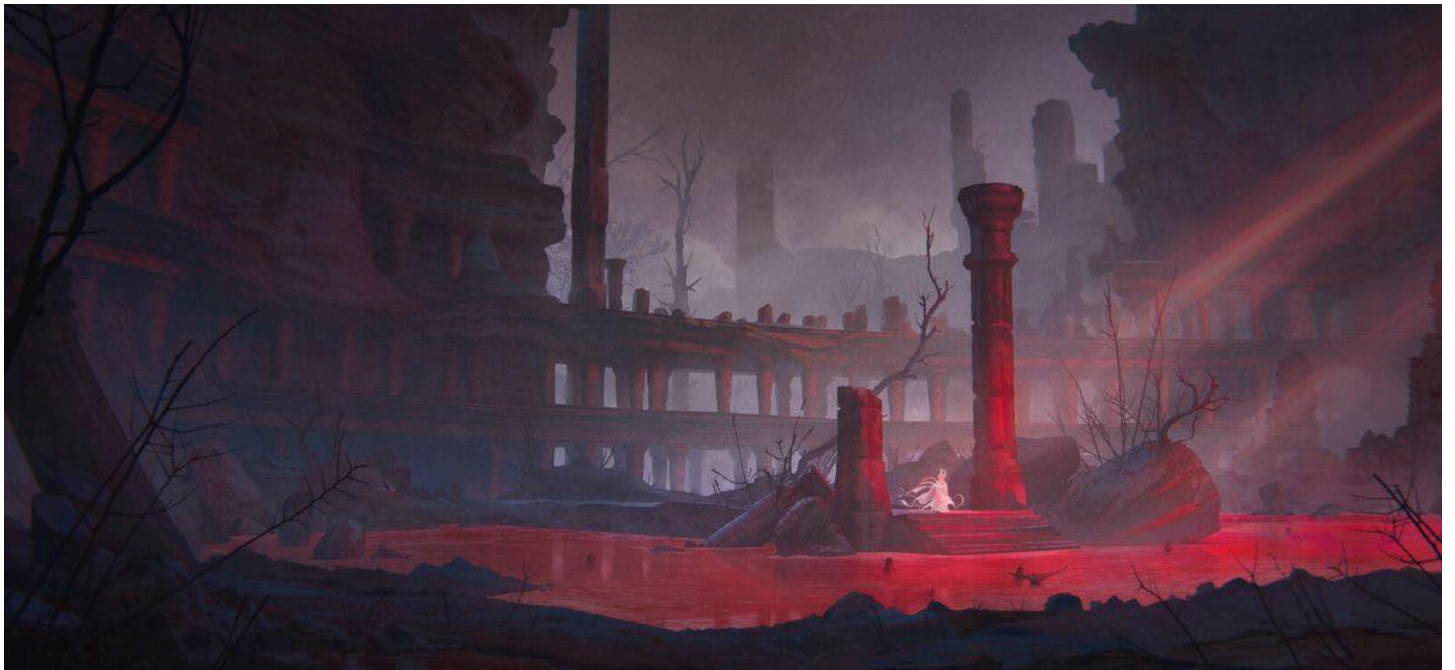
Salt, sulphur, air, (left>right)- earth and water, and the ouroborus- representing serpent.

Symbol stylised to look like an anchor, and some resemblance to the sacred heart of christianity.

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